

# These sheep provide environmentally friendly landscaping at solar farms

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Dominion Energy employs 17,000 people across the country. Now, about 1,000 sheep work for the power company as well.

In a process known as solar grazing, sheep consume vegetation on solar farms to reduce the need for lawnmowers and other landscaping machinery.

"Solar and sheep—they're both environmentally friendly alternatives," said Tim Eberly, a senior communications specialist for Dominion.

More research is being conducted in recent years to look into the benefits of solar grazing. Reducing costs and emissions from landscaping are two of the biggest pluses, according to the American Solar Grazing Association, an organization that promotes sheep grazing for solar farms.

Richmond-based Dominion Energy started using sheep for solar grazing in October. The company deploys sheep at six of its solar farms in Sussex, Greensville, Louisa, Mecklenburg, Middlesex and Pittsylvania counties.

The number of sheep on each farm depends on the size of the solar installation, Eberly said. About 100 sheep can maintain the grass at the Sussex [solar farm](#). The site contains over 80,000 solar panels on 216 acres and can generate up to 20 megawatts each day, enough to power 5,000 homes.

The sheep take shelter underneath the [solar panels](#) and rotate where they graze each day.

Jess and Marcus Gray launched a business, Gray's Lambscaping, in Southside Virginia, using their sheep for vegetation control. She works as CEO and he is president. Together, with their border collies, Trip and Myra, they go to the different Dominion Energy solar farms to check up on the sheep.

Before the pandemic, Jess Gray was a college field hockey coach and

Marcus Gray was a wildlife biologist. She wanted to work with her hands more, so they started the agricultural venture.

"I wanted to, at the end of the day, feel like I made a difference some way, somehow," Jess Gray said.

Gray's Lambscaping is the main solar grazing contractor with Dominion, and another farmer keeps sheep at one of the sites.

At the [solar farms](#), Trip and Myra respond to calls and whistle commands to herd the sheep to different areas. Another dog helps to protect the animals from predators, including outside dogs, foxes and bears.

The sheep are also cared for by other shepherds employed by Dominion, and they receive regular visits from a veterinarian, Jess Gray said.

Ecological benefits from the grazing include the sheep adding [organic matter](#) to the soil, which keeps the ground healthy and fertile, and reducing runoff by increasing the soil's water holding capacity, Marcus Gray said.

The use of sheep has not fully eliminated the need for landscaping yet. Eberly said the work between sheep and landscaping is at a 50-50 split, and the goal is to get it to a 75-25 sheep-to-landscaping ratio.

This summer is the first growing season the sheep have been through, and Dominion is still assessing whether having the [sheep](#) is cost-effective for the company, Eberly said.

"This is a solar [farm](#), and obviously that's a really valuable thing for us and for the community, residents of Virginia," Eberly said. "But to be able to have an agricultural use of the land too is really nice, because

we're getting as much out of the land as we can."

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